

# Big T Wash Line

November 2011



A Publication of the  
County of Los Angeles  
Department of Public Works  
(LACDPW)



## Announcement

- **Watch out for mosquitoes!** If you see any mosquito infestations at Big T, please report them to LACDPW (Refer to page 6 for contact information). Mosquitoes can carry deadly diseases such as West Nile Virus.
- **The rainy season is upon us** and we want to keep you and your family safe. Please stay out of the Mitigation Area when it rains. Debris flows resulting from the Station Fire are still a major threat to the region for the next 2 to 4 years.

## Featured Animal: Bobcat



While hiking around Big T, keep your eyes open for this elusive cat! Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are highly solitary animals typically found in riparian areas, shrub lands, forests, and chaparral. A bobcat was recently sighted in the mitigation area near the Tujunga Ponds!

Bobcats are generally tan to gray-brown in color with dark spots or streaks on

their body. The ears are long and black-tipped, and their tails are shortened, which makes them look "bobbed." The bobcat is larger and bulkier than your average housecat, weighing anywhere from 15 to 40 pounds!

Mostly active during the evening and early morning hours, the bobcat can travel up to 7 miles in one night while looking for food. They typically eat rabbits and hares, but have been known to also eat insects, rodents, birds, reptiles, and even young deer. The cat has highly acute hearing and vision and an excellent sense of smell.

If you are lucky enough to see one of these secretive cats, no need to worry! It will likely take cover pretty quickly. Bobcats are extremely shy and not known to be aggressive towards humans. Consider yourself one of the lucky few to actually see one of these beautiful cats.

## ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works' (LACDPW) implementation of the Final Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) has been under way since April 2000.

Big T is a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see Page 6). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other County of Los Angeles Public Works projects.

Big T protects one of the most rapidly diminishing habitat types found in Southern California—willow riparian woodland. Big T is home to several protected species of fish (Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, arroyo chub) and birds (least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher).

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an update of ongoing programs and to explain the upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site in the next few months. Newsletters will be published on a bi-annual basis (Spring and Fall).

More information can be found at <http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>

## Trail Maintenance Day

Please join Public Works and Ecorp Consulting for the 6th Annual Trail Maintenance Day. Help us clean up litter along the trails in the Big Tujunga Mitigation area.

- **When:** Saturday Nov. 5th from 8AM– 12PM
  - **Where:** Cottonwood Entrance (Wentworth St. and Cottonwood Ave.)
  - **Water, Snacks, and Trash bags will be provided.**
- If rain is predicted, Trail Maintenance Day will be canceled.*
- Please Bring:**
- Hat
  - Gloves
  - Comfortable Clothes
  - Sunblock
  - Bug Repellent
  - Close toed shoes

## “Bee” on the Lookout!



**Honey Bee:** Photo copyright: <http://bbe-tech.com/bees/bee-identification/>

Several ECORP employees and a maintenance crew member had recent and uncomfortable encounters with yellow jackets and honey bees at Big T. In both cases, non-native plants were being pulled or cut in the vicinity of nest and a hive and the bees went on the attack! Yellow jackets typically nest on the ground in rodent burrows or in hollow tree cavities and honey bees typically build their hives in tree cavities. Both species, but especially yellow jackets, can be highly defensive and troublesome when their nests, hives, or food sources are disturbed. While a bee can typically sting you only once, a yellow jacket can sting multiple times making them much more painful to contend with. Yellow

jackets and bees are commonly confused, but the best way to tell the two apart is by the hair (or lack of hair) on their bodies. Bees have a fuzzy or furry appearance whereas yellow jackets have smooth shiny bodies. Keep an eye out for areas where many bees appear to be congregating because this may indicate a nest or hive is present. If you accidentally come across a nest of either, it is best to stay clear and quickly get out of the area. Seek medical attention immediately for severe reactions to bites and stings.



UC State-wide IPM Project  
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**Yellow Jacket:** Photo by: Jack Kelly Clark.

## Cowbird Trapping Results for 2011

In our last newsletter, we announced the beginning of the brown-headed cowbird trapping season. The brown-headed cowbird is a nest parasite on our native birds. Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nest of other species leaving the hatching and rearing of the young to others. This causes our native birds to abandon their own eggs and young and end up raising the larger, faster growing cowbird chicks. We are happy to report that we had a very successful trapping season at Big T in 2011!



Two traps were placed in the Big T mitigation area, one was placed at the equestrian center, and another was placed at the Gibson Ranch. Traps are baited with food, water, and decoy cowbirds in order to encourage more cowbirds to enter the traps. Cowbirds generally flock in areas where livestock are kept so placing them at the equestrian center and the Gibson Ranch really helped to keep the mitigation area free of cowbirds. A big thanks to the equestrian center and the Gibson Ranch! A total of 211 cowbirds were trapped and removed in 2011! Only 9 juvenile cowbirds were captured, which likely indicates that very few of the cowbird pairs were successful in laying eggs in the nests of our native birds. Juvenile cowbirds are easy to catch when they first fledge from the nest, so the low number of captured juveniles suggests that cowbird parasitism was greatly reduced by our efforts in 2011.



## Water Lettuce Removal



Water lettuce quickly filled both ponds at Big T after it was introduced earlier this year, eliminating habitat for waterfowl and other birds and dramatically changing the aquatic environment. The thick mat of water lettuce has limited the removal of exotic wildlife that can also wreak havoc on native fish and amphibians. Eradication of the water lettuce began on September 13 with the help of a crew of volunteers from the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. The volunteers have been removing water lettuce from the east pond using rakes and pitchforks and have amassed large stockpiles of the plant on the banks of the pond. Openings in the water lettuce can be seen near the shore where the volunteers have concentrated their efforts. Nature's Image, the landscape contractor, began their removal efforts in the west pond. The equipment they are using includes a boat, nets, and a reach lift, which is a type of forklift with an extendable boom. The nets are deployed from the boat to surround a patch of water lettuce and then the net is pulled tight. The boom on the reach lift can be extended over the water where it lifts the loaded net and then empties the net into a nearby dumpster. This eliminates damage to the banks of the pond that may result if the nets

were dragged up onto the shore. By October 6<sup>th</sup>, the bulk of the water lettuce had been removed from the west pond. A total of 14 40-yard dumpsters had been filled. The effort has already started to pay off because wildlife have started returning to the ponds. An American coot, a type of waterfowl, has taken up residence in the west pond, and now that it can see the fish again, a belted kingfisher has also returned. Thanks to cooperation from the community, Nature's Image has been able to work safely, nearly free of interruptions from equestrians and hikers passing through the work area. Thank you all for respecting the safety issue of heavy equipment working in a confined area by avoiding the ponds during work hours. The removal is expected to last until mid-November.



## Rare Plants at Big T!

Davidson's bushmallow (*Malacothamnus davidsonii*) and southern black walnut (*Juglans californica*) are both rare plants that can be found growing in the Big T Mitigation area. Davidson's bushmallow is a shrub in the hibiscus family with



Davidson's bushmallow (*Malacothamnus davidsonii*)

fuzzy green leaves and small pink flowers that resemble miniature hibiscus flowers. This plant is endemic to California, meaning it only grows in California, and is listed as rare, threatened or

endangered by the California Native Plant Society. A good example of Davidson's bushmallow can be seen growing next to the trail on the east side of the east pond. Southern black walnut is also endemic to California and, although not as rare as Davidson's bushmallow, it is listed by the California Native Plant Society as a plant with limited distribution. Like other

types of walnut trees, it produces nuts, although they are smaller than typical walnuts found in grocery stores. Several southern black walnuts can be found on the trail between Cottonwood Avenue and the ponds. Be careful if you decide to pick up nuts from this tree, dyes in the husk around the shell will stain your hands black!



Above and Right:  
Southern Black Walnut (*Juglans californica*)



## Exotic Plants Not Welcome



Non-Native African Fountain Grass

ECORP biologists and a work crew from Nature's Image spent seven days during September removing invasive, non-native plants from the Big T mitigation area. Invasive plants, when left unchecked, can potentially overtake an area while providing little or no benefit to native wildlife species that rely on native plants for food, shelter, and habitat. Arundo (*Arundo donax*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), and tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*) were among the culprits targeted by the removal effort and are on the State of California's list of noxious weeds. Weeds were removed by hand-pulling, herbicide spraying, or a combination of cutting and spraying the stumps with herbicide. Large patches of arundo were removed along Haines Canyon Creek and in Big Tujunga Wash. Tree of heaven was also removed from areas along Haines Canyon Creek. Most of these were young trees ranging from a few inches to around eight feet in height. Tamarisk was removed from along Big Tujunga Wash. A large population of African fountain grass

(*Pennisetum setaceum*), another invasive weed, was found in the upland area in Big Tujunga Wash. Although African fountain grass is popular for landscaping, alternatives should be considered before planting this grass because it easily escapes into natural areas like Big T where it displaces native habitat. Information on what to plant and what to avoid can be found on the California Native Plant Society's website at [www.cnps.org](http://www.cnps.org). Eliminating the use of invasive plants in urban landscaping in surrounding areas and removing non-native plants helps keep the Big T Mitigation Area healthy, providing high-quality habitat for the plants and animals to thrive there.



Nature's Image removing non-native Arundo.



Davidson's bushmallow (*Malacothamnus davidsonii*).

## Announcements Continued

- **If planning an event** or a group activity in the Big T Mitigation Area, apply for a permit. Application can be found at: [http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/Flood\\_Permit\\_Application.pdf](http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/Flood_Permit_Application.pdf)
- **If you encounter loose, aggressive dogs** in the Mitigation Area or if any other incidents occur in the Mitigation Area, contact Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064.
- **If you encounter graffiti** in the Mitigation Area, please contact the Los Angeles County Graffiti Hotline at 1-800-675-4357.
- **Help our Fish Thrive!** Please do not build rock dams in the wash. Our fish need running water and stream habitat to survive. If you see a rock dam, please report to LACDPW.



# Animal Tracks

Do you know who left this print? He's been spotted near Tujunga Ponds at Big T! No, it's not a bear or a coyote. And no, it's not your pet dog. This print is from a bobcat! You can tell it's not a bear or dog print because it doesn't have any claws and it has an "M" shaped rear pad. Next time you are out for a hike, see if you can find any bobcat tracks at Big T!

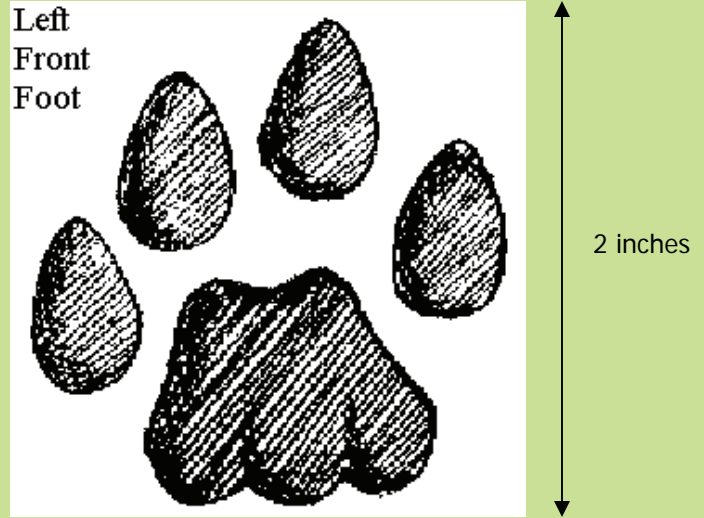


Photo copyright: <http://www.bear-tracker.com/bobcat.html>

## Big T Word Scramble



## Kid's Corner

Can you unscramble these words? All of the clues can be found throughout this month's newsletter. Good luck!

1. **WOLYLE KCTEJA**      \_\_\_\_\_  
Stay away from their nest! They might sting you.
2. **TCAOBB**      \_\_\_\_\_  
This animal is really shy and will likely hide from you.
3. **RPTEASIA**      \_\_\_\_\_  
The cowbird is a nest \_\_\_\_\_.
4. **DOYEC**      \_\_\_\_\_  
This is used to attract cowbirds to a trap.
5. **BAWHSMOULL**      \_\_\_\_\_  
This plant is a member of the hibiscus family.
6. **ARETW TTCEULE**      \_\_\_\_\_  
While it sounds good enough to eat, this plant is an unwelcome guest at Big T.

7. **RKCO MASD**      \_\_\_\_\_  
Building one of these in the wash is harmful to our native fish.
8. **TIXOEC NATPLS**      \_\_\_\_\_  
Crews spent time removing these in order for native plants and animals to thrive.
9. **ERET FO VANEHE**      \_\_\_\_\_  
A non-native plant species that was removed from the Big T Mitigation area.
10. **ADHN LUPILGN**      \_\_\_\_\_  
One method used to remove non-native plant species.

**Answers:** 1. Yellow Jacket 2. Bobcat 3. Parasite 4. Decoy  
5. Bushmallow 6. Water Lettuce 7. Rock Dams 8. Exotic  
Plants 9. Tree of Heaven 10. Hand-Pulling

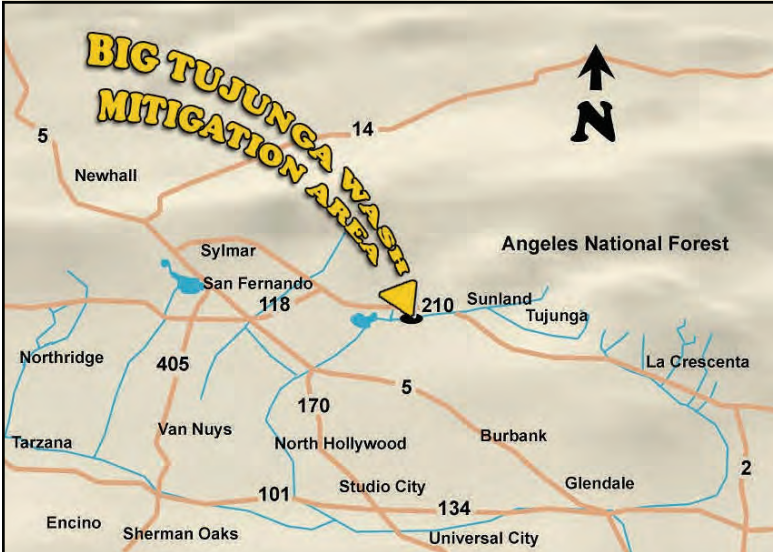


County of Los Angeles  
 Department of Public Works  
 Water Resources Division  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803



**Where is Big T?**

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in the heart of Sun Valley south of the 210 freeway, you'll find a native riparian (water loving plant) natural area filled with cottonwoods, willows and pools of water that support many native aquatic species. Check out the Big T website for more information at: <http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/>



**Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?**

- **CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT**
- Please **DO NOT** use 911 to report minor incidents or regulation infractions. Contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064.
- In the case of an emergency situation (those where 911 is involved) please make a follow up call to the Department of Public Works as soon as possible at the numbers listed below.\*
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations. Contact Sheriff's Department to handle the situation/incident.

\* For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday\*\*), please contact:

**Valerie De La Cruz or Cindy Rowlan**  
 Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803  
 Phone: (626) 458-6126 / (626) 458-6132  
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